

Executive Summary

This summary provides a brief overview of the preferred alternatives under consideration for the Peshtigo River State Forest. The alternatives are organized under three broad topic areas - land management, recreation, and boundary expansions. The development of the alternatives was guided by the property vision and goals, by the property's capabilities and limitations, and by regional needs and management opportunities on the Forest.

Overview of the Planning Process

A master plan defines how a property will be managed, used, and developed; how it will look and what benefits it will provide. There are several major phases in the planning process as well as opportunity for public input and participation. The main phases of the planning process are completing the property and regional analysis, establishing the property vision and goals, considering management alternatives, and finally, creating a draft plan and an environmental analysis.

The public played an important role in establishing the vision and goals for the Forest. This occurred in 2002 in conjunction with developing the plan for Governor Thompson State Park. The vision and goals establish the basic focus for the property and master plan. The next major phase for public involvement is review and commenting on the preferred alternative and other alternatives considered. Then, based on the comments received, a draft plan will be developed and that, along with an environmental assessment, will be put out for public review before it is finalized and presented to the Natural Resources Board for approval.

Highlights of the Proposed Preferred Alternative and Options

Proposed Land Management Preferred Alternative

Under the Department's preferred land management alternative for the Peshtigo River State Forest the Forest would be managed to maintain and enhance the existing undeveloped, scenic character of the forest, particularly in the areas viewable from the flowages and the river; to provide renewable forest products through the application of sustainable forest management practices; to protect and perpetuate a number of significant native communities found on the forest; and to provide a variety of habitats for wildlife. Management of the native communities and other actions proposed would protect endangered, threatened, and rare plant and animal species found on the forest.

Forest and Native Community Management

Under the preferred alternative proposal the Forest would have two management classifications, forest production and native community management. Each classification represents the primary management focus for an area. Approximately 8,000 acres (89% of the Peshtigo River State Forest) would be designated under two forest production areas, and just less than 1,000 acres (11% of the Peshtigo River State Forest) would be in five native community management areas.

The Forest Production Management Areas would be managed for the following purposes (The Preferred Alternative contains specific management objectives for each area):

- Sustainably produce timber and other forest products.
- Maintain and enhance scenic qualities of the Peshtigo River and flowages.
- Protect, maintain, and improve the water quality and riparian habitat.
- Increase white, jack and red pine where suitable, and maintain a diversity of forest types and ages for forest health, aesthetic appeal, and wildlife habitat.

The Native Community Management Areas would be managed for the following purposes. The preferred alternative contains specific management objectives for each area:

- Represent, restore, and perpetuate native plant and animal communities, and other aspects of native biological diversity.
- Maintain a mosaic of rare or representative community types that include older closed canopy forests of longer lived species, such as pines (on the uplands) and northern white cedar (on the lowlands), as well as an undeveloped lake and other unique attributes such as forested seeps and bedrock glades.
- Maintain a diversity of forested and unforested wetlands where suitable.
- Maintain, protect and enhance water quality, including coarse woody habitat.
- Protect rare species habitats and rare natural communities.
- Provide for research, education and ecological interpretation.

Wildlife Management

The abundant wildlife on the Peshtigo River State Forest requires diverse forest habitats in all successional stages. Diverse and healthy wildlife populations will be maintained by managing the composition and structure of habitats integrated with the land management plan.

Fisheries Management

The water resources in the Peshtigo River State Forest provide for a range of fish communities. This resource attracts a diverse group of anglers that play a major role in how these waters are managed. Native American treaty harvest rights also play a role. Management goals and activities for these waters vary by the type of water and angling potential. The four main water resources within the forest are cool water lakes, warm water lakes, cold water streams and warm water streams. Fishery management would focus on the following, based on suitable waters and habitats:

- Provide catch and release fishing opportunities as well as trophy opportunities.
- Maintain and enhance a self-sustaining trout fishery where suitable. Improve the food supply, provide cover, and improve spawning substrates.
- Maintain the special regulation category 5 trout waters between Johnson Falls and Sandstone Flowage.
- Conduct beaver control as necessary (limit dams that slow water flow and increase water temperatures).
- Regularly assess the health of the waters and their fishery.
- Set fishing regulations to provide a quality harvest as well as trophy opportunities. Evaluate the regulations to ensure the desired response is occurring in the fishery.

Proposed Recreation Management Preferred Alternative

The Peshtigo River State Forest preferred recreation management alternative maintains the property's traditional recreational uses and facilities while providing a number of facility upgrades and additions.

Water Access and Water Recreation

All existing flowages and the river access sites would be maintained. A number of improvements are proposed. Typical upgrades would include redesigning parking areas to be more efficient, repairing or upgrading launch ramps, correcting surface drainage problems, and providing boarding docks. A complete listing of water access improvements for each site is given in the Recreation Management Section of the master plan.

Currently many of the boat launch sites are being used for day-use activities like swimming and picnicking. Two sites are proposed to be designated day-use sites with picnic shelters, swimming areas, drinking water, toilets and additional day-use parking added.

Camping

Except for the Twin Bridges County Park campground operated by Marinette County, camping on the forest has been limited to 10 primitive, designated canoe campsites on the flowages. This popular camping opportunity would be maintained and expanded by adding ten "Primitive Water Access Campsites." Primitive Water Access Campsites must be registered and may be used for more than one night. The existing Canoe Campsites need not be registered, but are intended for one night's stay only. Primitive water access campsites provide a flat spot for a tent, box latrine, a fire ring, and picnic table. They are accessible on foot or from the water.

With the recent addition of the rustic campground at Old Veterans Lake, the preferred alternative proposes to continue this 16 site campground and expand it up to a total of 31 sites. An indoor group camp building that would accommodate up to 16 campers is also a proposed addition to the forest. It would be located in the Seymour Rapids area.

Trails

The existing trails and trail uses are proposed to be maintained and expanded. New opportunities for mountain bikers and equestrians would be added.

Snowmobiling on the forest is a cooperative effort with the Marinette County trail system. The existing 20 miles of designated snowmobile trails would be maintained. The existing designated shared winter All-Terrain Vehicle/snowmobile trail use would continue. Because of the Forest's limited capability the development of year round All-Terrain Vehicle trails is not proposed.

Approximately 28 miles of new hiking trails are proposed throughout the Forest. A new opportunity to be offered is mountain biking on a 15-20 mile long loop trail in the Spring Rapids area. Some improvements are proposed for the Spring Rapids cross-country ski trail system, including adding a toilet, drinking water, and a shelter to the trailhead. A new trail head with toilets and water would be constructed at the Seymour Rapids Trail.

In response to demand from equestrians a horse trail and campground is proposed. It would be located on the west side of the High Falls Flowage, south of County Hwy X.

Hunting, fishing, trapping and other traditional uses

Opportunities for these activities will remain abundant on the Forest. Overall access to the flowages, river and lands would be maintained and in some cases improved, particularly by the addition of additional miles of trail.

Proposed Boundary Expansion Options

The Peshtigo River State Forest as it's currently configured is a long narrow property. This creates a number of management and public use limitations that could be reduced by enlarging the Forest. Further, expanded acquisition for the Forest could extend protection to additional lands along the Peshtigo River, provide large-scale ecological benefits by creating permanent connections to the county forest and national forest, and provide additional recreation opportunities including access and potential expansion of trail networks.

Five areas are presented as potential options for state forest boundary expansion. Each are described briefly below. A preferred boundary expansion alternative has not been selected at this time. A recommendation will be developed for the draft plan after careful review of public comments.

Potential Peshtigo River State Forest Boundary Expansion Options

Option 1: Core Area - Expansion of the current Forest boundary out to roads or other prominent boundaries (27,065 acres).

Option 2: Roaring Rapids - Expansion of the Forest boundary up the Peshtigo River corridor to the Marinette County Forest (4,793 acres).

Option 3: Eagle Creek Watershed - An area north of Caldron Falls Flowage that would provide expanded forest management opportunities and connection to the Marinette County Forest (7,627 acres).

Option 4: Thunder River Block - This area lies south of Governor Thompson State Park and extends west from near the High Falls Flowage to the national forest (10,063 acres). Acquisition of this area would provide opportunities for expansion of recreational trails for the forest and park.

Option 5: Potato Rapids Block - This area lies north, west and east from the Peshtigo River State Forest boundary (3,641 acres). Acquisition of this area would create a larger block of continuous forest land connected with Highway E and other public roads, providing watershed protection and improved access.

Conclusion

The proposals outlined in the Peshtigo River State Forest Preferred Alternative and Options balance forest and ecological management objectives with the need to maintain and enhance recreational opportunities on the forest and the Peshtigo River and flowages. Recreational opportunities would be expanded and existing amenities will be upgraded and enhanced. Any number of the potential boundary expansions would expand ecological and environmental management opportunities as well as expand recreational opportunities and public access to public land. The preferred alternative would insure that the Peshtigo River State Forest would continue to provide important environmental, social, and economic benefits to the citizens of Wisconsin.

Purpose of State Forests

The management alternatives presented here are an important step in the process of developing a master plan for the Peshtigo River State Forest. The Department's master planning rule (Wisconsin Administrative Code NR44) identifies that these alternatives and the final property master plan must meet the statutory purpose of the property's designation. In this case, the property is a state forest as defined in Wisconsin Statutes 28.

State forests such as the Peshtigo River State Forest are an important part of the Department's broader mission to provide leadership in "all matters pertaining to forestry within the jurisdiction of the state...and advance the cause of forestry within the state" (§28.01). In order to define this mission, the purposes and benefits of state forests are outlined in the following language of 28.04 (2):

(a) The department shall manage the state forests to benefit the present and future generations of residents of this state, recognizing that the state forests contribute to local and statewide economies and to a healthy natural environment. The department shall assure the practice of sustainable forestry and use it to assure that state forests can provide a full range of benefits for present and future generations. The department shall also assure that the management of state forests is consistent with the ecological capability of the state forest land and with the long-term maintenance of sustainable forest communities and ecosystems. These benefits include soil protection, public hunting, protection of water quality, production of recurring forest products, outdoor recreation, native biological diversity, aquatic and terrestrial wildlife, and aesthetics. The range of benefits provided by the department in each state forest shall reflect its unique character and position in the regional landscape.

(b) In managing the state forests, the department shall recognize that not all benefits under par. (a) can or should be provided in every area of a state forest.

(c) In managing the state forests, the department shall recognize that management may consist of both active and passive techniques.

The management alternatives all meet this statutory purpose and will be evaluated to determine how well they could potentially satisfy the unique role of a state forest.